

BEST VALUE REVIEW OF PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING SERVICES – STAGE 3

Report By: Director of Social Care and Strategic Housing

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

1. To consider and approve the Stage 3 report and outcomes of the Best Value Review of Private Sector Housing. Copies of the Stage 3 report have been issued separately to members of the Committee and are available to the public on request.

Financial Implications

2. The report makes a number of recommendations for service development, some of which would have cost implications. These will be considered and form the basis of the Improvement Plan that will be reported under Stage 4 of the Best Value Review process.

Assessing Stage 3 Reports

3. In considering Stage 3 reports, responsibility rests with the Chair of the relevant Scrutiny Committee, supported by officers, to satisfy the Strategic Monitoring Committee that the requirements of the review process have been met. In doing so, the role of the Strategic Monitoring Committee is to ensure the robustness of the review process, rather than revisiting the detail of each review.

Background to the Review

3. The review has included all service areas within Private Sector Housing, comprising: Enforcement including Houses in Multiple Occupation, Grants and other forms of Financial Assistance, Adaptations and the Home Improvement Agency and Energy Efficiency. The four main service elements were individually considered and processed through the SWOT analysis and option appraisal stages prior to integrating the results into this report. .
4. For stage 3 the Review team included: 1 Elected member, a critical friend, the Private Sector Housing Manager, the lead officers for the four main service areas in Private Sector Housing, the Enabling Manager (Strategic Housing), a Private Landlord, a Private Sector Tenant, a Managing Agent, a Contractor, representatives from the Home Improvement Agency, Citizens Advice Bureaux, Social Care and Finance Departments. The meetings were chaired by the Performance and Improvement Manager for Social Care and Strategic Housing
5. A wide range of service users and other stakeholders were consulted on the draft Stage 3 report, as detailed on page 27 of the final report (attached).

6. The Scrutiny Committee for Social Care and Strategic Housing considered the contents of the Stage 3 Report on 10th June 2005, and approved the recommendations, as amended.

Data collection

7. In general comparative data was readily available from other local authorities in relation to statutory areas of service or where national performance indicators were involved. However, where more recent legislative changes have provided flexibility to focus on local priorities and targets, policies and data availability vary significantly, and have proved challenging to the review process. Within Herefordshire data was collected from user and non-user groups, and from partner organisations.

Challenge

8. Statutory areas of the service were challenged in relation to ways in which they might be improved and provide value for money.
9. Non-statutory work areas were analysed, and through consultation with service users and stakeholders, consideration was given as to whether those services should continue or be provided in different ways to further benefit users. Best Practice from Beacon and other Local Authorities considered to be leaders in their field was used to inform this process.

Consultation

10. Consultation with users and stakeholders has included survey and satisfaction questionnaires, and through focus groups formed around specific work areas. All grant recipients are surveyed as an on-going process, and further surveys have been undertaken to consult with landlords and tenants of Houses in Multiple Occupation, the Citizens Panel and those requesting grant information but not continuing with the process (non-users).
11. The focus groups have comprised representatives from a wide range of organisations including energy suppliers, the Primary Care Trust, Age Concern, the Fire Authority, the Energy Efficiency Advice Centre and team members from the services under review.
12. The results of the consultation processes were integrated into the review process and assisted in the option appraisal stage when improvements to the existing service were proposed for inclusion in the recommendations section.

Comparison

13. Local data was compared to that obtained from other providers of a similar range of services. In general these were all local authorities, although some data was obtained from agencies providing specialist technical and professional staff for housing activities.
14. 7 benchmarking exercises were undertaken and included the following groups: local district authorities from Gloucestershire, a group of unitary authorities, the Midlands and South Yorkshire Adaptation Benchmarking Club, the Shropshire, Herefordshire and Stoke Energy Advice Centre members. The exercises did highlight some inconsistencies in reporting mechanisms especially within energy efficiency, and in

service areas where Herefordshire did not compare favourably these have been addressed within the recommendations for improvement.

Compete

15. A comprehensive option appraisal process was carried out in three stages. Firstly the service as a whole was considered under 6 option headings: do nothing, develop the existing service, someone else to deliver the service, restructure the team, restructure the team to include the Home Improvement Agency and cease the service. The same set of options was then subject to a numerical scoring exercise for each of the 4 main service areas to complement the initial appraisal stage.
16. The final option appraisal was undertaken in more detail with 3 options: cease the service, reduce the service, develop the service.
17. The difficulties associated with other non-housing authority organisations delivering statutory services were discussed, whilst acknowledging that some of the discretionary service elements could be undertaken by specialist providers. It was agreed that because of the wide range of services delivered any proposals to provide statutory and non-statutory services separately would lead to an unacceptable fragmented approach for service users.
18. The option to develop the existing service evolved around the need to integrate recent legislative changes, address the prevention agenda in housing, health and social care, and assist independent living by adapting properties to suit needs.
19. Following a final consultation on this report, the Best Value Team agreed that the best option for Private Sector Housing Services is for the existing service to be further developed to meet future challenges and priorities.
20. Risk assessment
21. There is limited risk in pursuing the option of development of the existing service.

Process issues

22. The main issue that impacted on the review process has been that the Best Value 1st Stage report was presented in January 2003. The delay in continuing the process, caused by long term staff sickness and vacancies, necessitated changes within the Review Team membership, including a new chairman.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT (a) Strategic Monitoring Committee endorse the recommendation of the Social Care and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Committee on the Stage 3 report of the Best Value Review of Private Sector Housing

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Private Sector Housing Best Value Review Third Stage Report